

BACKGROUND

Hearing loss affects some 28 million Americans, including more than half of those over age 65. Among the possible causes are allergies, infections, drugs, exposure to noise, genetics, or simply age. *Conductive* hearing loss can often be reversed through surgery or medication. *Sensorineural* hearing loss is permanent, but can often be helped through the use of hearing aids.

WHAT VA IS DOING

VA scientists, engineers and clinicians are studying ways to prevent, diagnose and treat hearing loss, addressing a wide range of technological, medical, rehabilitative and social issues.

Highlights of current or recent research include the following:

- **Study links diabetes, hearing loss**—Diabetes may lead to premature aging of the auditory system, according to preliminary data from a five-year study of 694 veterans aged 25 to 85 by VA's National Center for Rehabilitative Auditory Research (NCRAR) in Portland. Researchers believe the hearing loss may be due to the effects of diabetes on nerves and small blood vessels.
- **Improving hearing aid acceptance**—Investigators at the NCRAR are partnering with audiologists at the University of Connecticut to develop a model of individualized counseling to increase the acceptance and use of hearing aids among people who may benefit from them.
- **New treatment for ear infections**—Otitis media occurs mostly in young children, but also affects adults. VA treats up to 60,000 cases a year. Molecular biologists with VA and Oregon Health and Science University are exploring how certain proteins may reduce inflammation and fluid accumulation. Now being tested in animals, the therapy may one day be an adjunct or alternative to antibiotic treatment for this condition.

For more information on VA research:

Web: www.va.gov/resdev

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